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Rebels' Backers on Hill Press Aid Issue

Administration Accused of Ambiguity in Military Effort

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Congressional supporters of the resistance movement to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, backed by outside lobbying groups, are pressuring the Reagan administration to improve the effectiveness of its military aid to the guerrillas and end its ban on the delivery of American-made arms, particularly antiaircraft weapons.

These congressmen also are seeking to get the administration to name a high-level White House presidential adviser to coordinate U.S. policy toward Afghanistan and the expanding American aid to the rebels. The Central Intelligence Agency, the Agency for International Development and the Pentagon each has its own program.

One of the chief charges being leveled against the administration by U.S. supporters of the Afghan guerrilla struggle is that Washington's policy has no clear objectives. The critics are charging the White House has never made up its mind whether it wants a clear-cut Afghan guerrilla victory or a low-level campaign of harassment of the Soviet Union.

Outside analysts and even some administration officials concede that six years after the start of the U.S. aid, American objectives remain ambiguous—caused by Washington's concern over the Soviet reaction to a more direct U.S. involvement and by caution in Pakistan toward the conflict.

Despite this ambiguity, the U.S. commitment to the guerrilla forces has grown steadily. While the level of funding for the CIA's Afghan operation remains a secret, congressional and other sources say the House and Senate intelligence committees initially approved $470 million for covert military assistance last spring for the current fiscal year.

Later, there were reports that Congress had approved a supplemental $300 million in aid over two years. It is not clear whether the supplement is reflected in the $470 million figure or is in addition to it.

Congress now has approved $15 million in annual humanitarian assistance, which AID will administer, and another $10 million for the Defense Department to cover the cost of transporting such nonlethal items as clothes and blankets to Pakistan for Afghan refugees.

While President Reagan repeatedly has stressed his commitment to the Afghan resistance, the main thrust for steady increases in aid has come from Congress. According to a former Senate Select Intelligence Committee staff member, the committee each year has doubled the administration's initial request.

Unlike divisive debates over the administration's desire to provide covert military aid to rebel groups fighting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua or Marxist rule in Angola, Congress has achieved consensus on providing more assistance to the Afghan rebels.

This has made the administration nervous about the implications for its relations with Moscow.

Administration spokesmen defend the current program as a major success, citing the ability of Afghan guerrillas to fight the estimated 118,000 Soviet troops stationed in Afghanistan to a stalemate and claiming that they have shot down nearly 800 aircraft—a figure met with some skepticism by independent observers.

The spokesmen say the United States is doing all it can, given its dependence on Pakistan to funnel aid to the rebels, and that the administration's general caution only reflects Pakistan's.

"We have a right to be cautious. We're dealing with another sovereign country and it could blow up in our face," said one U.S. official.

The administration's critics also charge a lack of direct U.S. control over the delivery of U.S.-purchased arms, which, U.S. critics and guerrilla leaders alike charge, has resulted in many weapons not getting through to the battlefield.

Some congressmen also are complaining that the CIA, in the absence of a clearly stated White House objective in Afghanistan, is making policy on its own. "It's so damn obscure what the policy is. There is no clear objective," said Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyo.), adding that CIA Deputy Director John McMahon "has told me it [U.S. aid] cannot be too successful."

Wallop and Sen. Gordon J. Humphrey (R-N.H.) have been instrumental in lobbying the administration for a clearer, all-out commitment to an Afghan guerrilla victory.

Other congressional sources said McMahon had argued before the House and Senate intelligence committees last year against provision of American antiaircraft weapons or a much larger covert program, saying the administration was concerned they might provoke the Soviets into retaliating against Pakistan and believed authorities there would not agree to either.

Rep. Charles Wilson (D-Tex.) asserted that the CIA and McMahon are taking "a bum rap" and that the agency is doing "as much as is humanly possible within the parameters of our policy—which is no Americans and no American arms involved in the conflict.

"The president has got to decide on a change," said Wilson.

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